

The Montez Effect

by Anthony Graham

Before beginning my 60-hour observations in Ms. Cotten's 10th-grade World Literature class, and my student-teaching experience, I was unsure whether I really wanted to teach. I had heard many horror stories about student teachers and first-year teachers who ran from the profession because they could not handle the rowdy students. I was worried about how I would be received by the students and my cooperating teacher.

When I crossed the classroom's threshold, I immediately was greeted by Montez—a short African-American boy with a mouthful of braces. He stood directly in front of me, measuring me from head to toe. He glared into my eyes without blinking and asked bluntly, "You our new student teacher?" "Yes," I replied. He shook his head, lowered it momentarily, and then looked back into my eyes and remarked, "You don't want to teach us. We're the dumb kids." Then, quietly, he turned and walked away as mysteriously as he had appeared.

As I sat in the classroom to begin my observation, Montez's comment replayed itself in my head. I wondered why he felt this way about himself and his peers. I wondered what the teachers in the school had done to affirm his belief and what they had done to attempt to destroy it.

Eight years have passed since this encounter, yet I remember it vividly. I did not know at the time that Montez's comment would affect me every day of my life. On days that I question "Why am I doing this?" Montez's remark resonates in my head, and I answer "Because I must."

Though I never seriously have considered leaving education, the

thought has crossed my mind on frustrating days when I have had to face the bureaucratic and political issues of the profession. I see some educators shifting their focus from teaching students about real-world issues to bribing students to memorize information so that they can reap

of ignored voices similar to Montez's crying out for someone to help. I learned from Montez what no teacher education program or textbook on pedagogy or language arts content could ever teach me. I learned that I am needed. And for this reason, I choose to remain. ■



"I choose to remain in education because I hear thousands of ignored voices similar to Montez's crying out for someone to help."

the benefits of raised standardized test scores in the form of one-time pay supplements. I see educators getting lost in the capitalistic aspect of education where money dictates rather than providing students with meaningful learning opportunities where they are able to interact with one another and discuss issues that influence and impact their lives.

I also see fewer minority male teachers in the classroom serving as live role models to youths like Montez, who do not view education as a viable option. Instead, these young men look to television to formulate their aspirations, many of them sacrificing learning for "hoop dreams."

I choose to remain in education because I do not want to lose a Montez and others like him—students who possess limitless potential, but question their abilities and doubt their intelligence. I choose to remain in education because I hear thousands

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